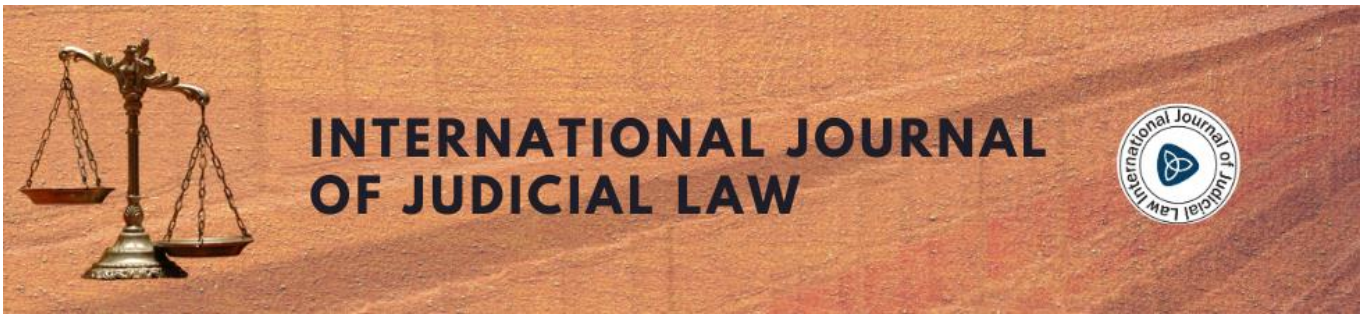




Female Employees Rights: A Study of Vietnamese Law and the USA Law

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2583-6536

Volume: 04

Issue: 03

May-June 2025

Received: 07-04-2025

Accepted: 06-05-2025

Page No: 103-108

Abstract

Gender equality aims to eliminate gender discrimination, create equal opportunities for men and women in all fields, and create momentum for socio-economic development. In Labor, gender equality is also not outside of eliminating discrimination. Gender-based treatment provides equal opportunities, conditions, and benefits based on working capacity, not gender differences, between male and female employees in labor relations. Therefore, *ensuring the principle of gender equality* in labor relations Labor is one of the leading policies of the Vietnamese State in the labor field. It is not only to protect the rights of female employees but also a policy towards sustainable and comprehensive national economic development, contributing to ensuring social security for the country and integrating with the international economy. Through the study of Vietnamese labor law and comparison with US labor law on female employees, the author will present a viewpoint to perfect Vietnamese labor law on female employees.

Keywords: Female Employees, Gender Equality

1. Introduction

In the period of international integration, joining the international conventions on Labor of the International Labor Organization to internalize them into the national legal system is an important task, contributing to perfecting labor laws and improving the domestic working environment to meet international labor standards. Up to now, Vietnam has ratified many conventions of the International Labor Organization. Among them, Convention 100 Equal Remuneration, 1951 and Convention 111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958 that are two conventions with main contents on ensuring gender equality in labor relations between male and female employees.

Female employees play a vital role in the global labor market. Female employees account for about 48% of the national labor market in our country. They are mainly concentrated in manufacturing industries such as garment, footwear, food industry, etc., which are important economic sectors of the country. Vietnam's global market share was about 3.7% in the textile and garment industry alone in 2013. In 2013, the textile and garment industry achieved an export turnover of over 20 billion USD, an increase of 79% compared to 2010 and 18% compared to 2012. Vietnam's textile and garment industry has created jobs for over 2.5 million employees, most of whom are female employees. With gender characteristics, gender brings female employees certain advantages and limitations. Thanks to their skillful and meticulous characteristics, working skills, and increasingly improved professional qualifications, female employees are an indispensable labor force in the development of several manufacturing industries, such as garments, leather shoes, etc. However, Vietnamese society, due to the profound influence of Confucianism, which *favours men over women*, associates women with the default role of doing housework, giving birth, and taking care of children, leading to the consequence that female employees do not have much time and conditions to develop their abilities, strengths, and improve their skills. Despite such an important role, due to backward limitations in ideology and natural psychological characteristics, female employees need to be given separate rights, creating opportunities for this subject to participate in Labor and perform their role in the family.

2. General overview of female employees

2.1 Concept of Female Labor

Labor is creating material wealth for humans by using labor tools to impact the natural world and meet the needs of daily life, which is also the natural need of humans. In economics, *Labor* is understood as a factor of production created by humans (commodities). The subject that needs *labor* is called the producer, and from the perspective of forensic science, it is called the historian by employers. The subject providing goods is the worker, viewed from the economic or legal science perspective. Like all goods, *labor power* is given change in the labor market. Labor is an important condition for the existence of human society, the foundation for progress in economic, political, cultural, and social aspects. Therefore, through the labor process, humans liberate productive forces and effectively exploit the potential of nature, so starting from liberating employees will lead to the inevitable result of contributing to the development of the socio-economy to new heights.

Labor relations are established between employers and employees to exchange Labor and wages. Employers always aim to buy Labor at the cheapest price while bringing in the highest profit, while employees want to sell their Labor at the highest price. According to the provisions of the 2019 Labor Code, to meet the conditions for participating in labor relations, employees must meet two conditions: being 15 years of age or older and having the ability to work^[1]. Based on gender criteria, employees are divided into male and female employees. Both of these subjects have the typical characteristics of being 15 years of age or older and able to work. However, due to the differences in gender and sex between male and female employees, female employees are required by law to be granted special rights when participating in labor relations. To create favorable conditions for female employees to have the opportunity to participate in labor relations as well as develop personal capacity during the working process.

Gender is a concept used to refer to the biological characteristics of men and women. The differences between men and women are expressed through biological aspects, genes, and other hereditary factors. Gender characteristics between male and female employees have common points, such as not depending on time and space. Regardless of the environment or time, the characteristics of gender (male, female) do not change and do not depend on the subjective will of people. Elemental manifestations of gender (male or female) are all observable, have their characteristics, and are associated with the biological function of each type. For women, biological characteristics are associated with the function of giving birth and raising children. In addition, women often have weaker psychological and physical characteristics than men.

According to the provisions of Vietnamese law, “limiting characteristics, positions, position, the role of men and women in all social relationships”^[2]. Accordingly, gender refers to out-of-relationship society- literature gender discrimination is how society divides people into categories, types, and norms. Assigning each type a specific type of behavior, responsibilities, and rights. Through that, we can

understand the division of Labor based on gender as the division of work between men and women based on social prejudices about the roles of men and women in the family and society, creating gender inequality in labor relations.

The gender characteristics of Vietnamese women, in general, and female employees, in particular, are clearly shown in the tradition and culture of our country since the feudal period, which is the ideology of *male chauvinism*. The role of women is only included in cooking and childcare, the one who serves her husband’s family. Until today, due to the influence of feudal Confucianism’s ideology that has been deeply ingrained in Vietnamese people’s thinking and living habits, women’s equality in society is still more or less affected. Therefore, in addition to participating in production labor to generate income for the family, female employees also have to assume the role of women in the family. The family takes care of the children and does housework. In terms of time, health, and material conditions, these limitations make it difficult for female employees to develop their abilities or complete their work well. Therefore, the State’s regulations and policies to support female employees in fulfilling their roles in the family will significantly contribute to creating opportunities to utilize female labor resources.

Thus, the difference between male and female employees is based on the characteristics of gender and sex characteristics to determine. Gender characteristics of female employees are specific biological characteristics associated with the function of giving birth and raising children. Gender characteristics of labor Women’s Labor is mainly expressed through the role of women in the family, which is the role of mother and wife. Identifying this difference is not only to define the subject status in labor relations clearly but also as one of the bases for us to evaluate the perfection and limitations of the State’s policies and regulations on female labor.

Currently, Vietnamese law, as well as that of other countries, has not yet provided a concept of female employees. In reality, to distinguish between male and female employees, employers will base their decisions on the content of personal records such as identity cards and birth certificates. However, based on the characteristics of gender and sex, we can understand that *“Female employees are employees have gender characteristics; the female gender has specific biological characteristics associated with the reproductive function.”*

2.2 Characteristics of female employees

Female employees are considered special employees. Due to their specific psychological and physiological characteristics, the most typical manifestation of which is the ability to reproduce and perform *the role of motherhood* and the role in society with specific gender characteristics. In addition to the fundamental rights of employees, female employees are granted by labor law several separate rights that no other type of worker has to protect the health and fundamental rights of female employees during pregnancy, childbirth, and raising children under 12 months old. It also creates conditions for women to have the best opportunity to participate in labor relations. Working while taking care of family life. It also

¹ In some cases, it is possible to employ workers under 15 years old, such as people from 13 years old to under 15 years old, who are only allowed to do light work according to the list issued by the Minister of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs. People under 13 years old are only allowed to do art, physical education, and sports work.

² Article 5 Luật bình đẳng giới 2006

ensures harmonious labor relations between female employees and employers, creating momentum for socio-economic development.

Therefore, in addition to the fundamental rights of employees, the Labor Code 2019 has dedicated a separate chapter to regulate the State's policies, granting female employees separate rights ^[3]. Based on the specific characteristics of female employees, we can see that this subject has signs of the following features:

- **Firstly, female employees are physically and mentally disadvantaged and have poor skills**

Women are often psychologically vulnerable and have poorer health conditions than men, and female employees are no exception. Therefore, for some jobs that require too much health, female employees will not be qualified to participate in the labor force. However, because of their outstanding advantages over male employees in terms of dexterity and meticulousness, female employees are the leading human resource in handicraft industries such as garment and footwear, which are all important economic sectors of the country.

- **Second, there are gender characteristics that perform reproductive functions**

The gender characteristics of female employees are expressed through the monthly menstrual cycle and *motherhood* (pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, etc.). With these biological characteristics, female employees require special rights to protect their physical and mental health, that of the fetus and the child after birth. Therefore, the Labor Code 2019 also stipulates that female employees are entitled to special rights such as the right to maternity leave, the right to take a 30-minute break during menstruation, the right to take a 60-minute break each day while raising a child under 12 months old, the right to be guaranteed by the employer a suitable shower and toilet at the workplace. In addition, the physiological characteristics of women in general and female employees, in particular, are that they are physically weaker than male employees and cannot undertake work that is too heavy and can hurt their health later on, especially their reproductive health. Therefore, female employees priority should be given to not doing jobs such as jobs that require frequent immersion in water, jobs that require frequent work in mines, jobs that have adverse effects on reproductive function, and child-rearing.

- **Third, female employees, in addition to participating in production, are also women in the family, taking on the roles of mother and wife.**

This characteristic of women in general and female employees, in particular, is shown through the following: Cultural characteristics, socio-economics, habits, health, abilities, traditional customs, and norms, collectively known as *gender*, are factors that have no small influence on the labor results of female employees. Psychological, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics are important when developing content for labor law. Regulate labor relations with the participation of female employees to build specific regulations to suit them. Reality shows that female employees increasingly know

how to overcome the difficulties and challenges of the market, demonstrating a proactive role in all economic, social, and political fields. They participate in all professions previously considered male-dominated fields, such as mechanical engineering, space science, and information technology. Gradually balancing their labor function and motherhood role.

2.3 The role of female employees

With gender characteristics, female employees have characteristics that help this subject play important roles in the labor market. From there, it is an indispensable driving force for the country's socio-economic development.

- **Firstly, female employees are an abundant workforce in the labor market.**

Women comprise more than 40% of the global workforce, 43% of agricultural employees, and more than half of university students worldwide. In Vietnam alone, the labor force aged 15 and over nationwide by 2015 was estimated at 52.840 million people, an increase of nearly 100 thousand people compared to the same period in 2014. Of which, male employees, 27,216.7 million people, accounting for 60.2%; female employees, 25,623.3 million people, accounting for 55.1% ^[4]. For an economy to function to its full potential, women's skills and talents must be used in activities that allow them to be used to their fullest potential. When women's Labor is wasted or misused, often because of gender discrimination that keeps women from completing their education, working in certain occupations, and earning the same income as men, it causes significant damage to the national economy because this human resource is not utilized due to misconceptions about women. Removing barriers limiting women's participation in specific occupations has had positive results, reducing the productivity gap between male and female employees by 1/3-1/2 and increasing productivity by 3%-25% in various countries. In countries and regions with rapidly aging populations, such as China, Europe, and Central Asia, women entering and remaining in the workforce will help reduce the impact of a declining working-age population ^[5].

Therefore, utilizing female labor resources is an important task that any country must achieve, and to do this, eliminating discrimination and creating gender equality in labor relations is not outside the above goal.

- **Second, gender characteristics help female employees play an indispensable role in many job positions in today's labor market**

In today's labor market, female employees play a vital role, especially in industries that require dexterity and flexibility, typically handicrafts. Female employees account for many industries, such as garment, leather shoes, or electronic component assembly. Vietnam has a high proportion of women participating in the labor force, the highest in the world (about 48.6%). According to statistics from the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, the proportion of female employees in enterprises is always around 50%. This shows that female employees also play an important role in enterprises. The

³ Chapter X của Bộ luật lao động 2019.

⁴ General Statistics Office of Vietnam, <http://gso.gov.vn/default.aspx?tabid=714>

⁵ World Bank, World Development Report 2012, *Gender Equality and Development Overview*.

role of women and men in Labor is increasingly equal ^[6].

- **Third, gender characteristics help female employees play a huge role in promoting socio-economic development.**

The Party and the State always have policies and care for female employees' rights, helping them to promote their role and potential in the cause of industrialization and modernization. Modernization of the country. Enhancing the status of women and achieving gender equality in all political, economic, cultural, and social fields is one of the important tasks and goals of Vietnam in the new period. However, the most important thing is that each worker himself. Female employees must proactively equip themselves with knowledge and demonstrate their professional abilities to meet job requirements and create a foundation for future advancement ^[7].

Modern life is posing significant challenges to women. Female employees directly participate in production to create material wealth to meet the needs of national economic development. At the same time, they assume the role of a woman in the family, both mother and wife. With the role of building a home, women take on the responsibility of caring for, raising, and educating children, taking care of the material and spiritual life of the family, and building a happy family. Prosperity creates the foundation for social development. Must work and study to improve qualifications. The degree to keep up with the pace of life in society while striving to fulfill the role of wife and mother to build a prosperous, equal, progressive, and happy family. The role and responsibility of women are exceptionally significant. Typically, we can see that the total number of female employees at the Vietnam Gas Corporation currently has more than 700 people participating in most areas of work. The proportion of female employees with university or college degrees or higher accounts for over 80%, and there are key female leaders. Every year, 90 - 100% of female employees achieve the title of advanced employees ^[8].

3. Vietnamese labor law on female employees

One of the labor policies includes a prominent policy on ensuring the rights of female employees, which includes ensuring gender equality and regulating labor regimes and social policies to protect female employees, employees with disabilities and elderly and minor employees ^[9].

The State policies on female employees include (1) Ensuring equal rights for female and male employees, implementing measures to ensure gender equality and prevent and combat sexual harassment in the workplace; (2) Encourage employers to create conditions for female and male employees to have regular jobs, widely apply flexible working schedules, part-time work, and assign work at home; (3) Take measures to create jobs, improve working conditions, enhance professional qualifications, provide health care, and enhance the material and spiritual welfare of

female employees to help them effectively develop their professional capacity, harmoniously combine working life and family life; (4) Have tax reduction policies for employers who employ many female employees according to the provisions of the law on taxes; (5) The State has plans and measures to organize nurseries and kindergartens in places with many employees. Expand many types of training to facilitate additional backup jobs for female employees and to suit women's physical, physiological, and maternal characteristics ^[10].

- **Regarding the responsibilities of employers:** Ensure gender equality and implement measures to promote gender equality in recruitment, job placement, job placement, training, working hours, rest hours, wages, and other regimes. Consult female employees or their representatives when deciding on women's rights and interests. Ensure there are adequate shower and toilet facilities in the workplace. Help and support the construction of nurseries and kindergartens, or part of the cost of childcare and kindergarten for employees ^[11]. Maternity protection: Employers are not allowed to use employees to work at night, work overtime, and go on long business trips in the following cases: (a) Pregnant from the seventh month or the sixth month if working in mountainous, remote, border or island areas; (b) Raising a child under 12 months old, unless agreed by employees. Female employees who do heavy, toxic, dangerous, or especially heavily toxic, dangerous jobs or jobs that have adverse effects on reproductive function and child-rearing during pregnancy and notify the employer will be transferred by the employer to lighter, safer work or have their daily working hours reduced by 1 hour without any reduction in salary, rights, and benefits until the end of the period of raising children under 12 months old. Employers are not allowed to dismiss or unilaterally terminate the labor contract of employees for reasons of marriage, pregnancy, maternity leave, or raising children under 12 months old, except in cases where the employer is an individual who dies, is declared by the Court to have lost civil act capacity, is missing or dead, or the employer is not an individual who ceases operations or is notified by the specialized agency for business registration under the People's Committee of the province that there is no legal representative or person authorized to exercise the rights and obligations of the legal representative. If the labor contract expires while female employees are pregnant or raising a child under 12 months old, she will be given priority to sign a new labor contract. Female employees during menstruation are entitled to 30 minutes off each day, and those raising children under 12 months of age are entitled to 60 minutes off during working hours. During the time off, they are still entitled to full salary according to the labor contract ^[12].

- **Right to unilaterally terminate or suspend the labor contract of pregnant female employees:** If a pregnant

⁶ Phạm Thanh Hồng (2011), "Vấn đề an toàn, vệ sinh lao động đối với lao động nữ", Tạp chí lao động và xã hội, số 373/2011.

⁷ Nghị quyết 11-NQ/TW Về công tác phụ nữ thời kỳ đẩy mạnh công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa đất nước.

⁸ Quế Chi, Chủ tịch nước Trương Tấn Sang gặp mặt nữ lao động Dầu khí tiêu biểu, <https://www.pvoil.com.vn/vi-VN/tin-trong-nganh/chu-tich-nuoc-truong-tan-sang-gap-mat-nu-lao-dong-dau-ki-tieu-bieu/248/1337>

⁹ Article 4 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

¹⁰ Article 135 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

¹¹ Article 136 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

¹² Article 137 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

female employees has confirmation from a competent medical examination and treatment facility that continuing to work will adversely affect the fetus, she has the right to unilaterally terminate the labor contract or suspend the performance of the labor contract. In case of unilateral termination of the labor contract or suspension of the performance of the labor contract, the employer must be notified, together with confirmation from a competent medical examination and treatment facility, that continuing to work will adversely affect the fetus. In case of suspension of the labor contract, employees and the employer shall agree upon the suspension period. However, it must be at least equal to the period of temporary leave prescribed by the competent medical examination and treatment facility. Suppose there is no indication from a competent medical examination and treatment facility regarding the period of temporary leave. In that case, the two parties shall agree on the period of temporary leave of the labor contract^[13]. Employers are not allowed to terminate the labor contract of pregnant female employees unilaterally; employees on maternity leave or raising children under 12 months old^[14]. Employers cannot take disciplinary action against pregnant female employees, employees on maternity leave, or employees raising children under 12 months old^[15].

- **Maternity leave:** Female employees are entitled to 06 months of maternity leave before and after giving birth; the leave period before giving birth must not exceed 02 months. In case a female employees gives birth to twins or more, starting from the second child onwards, for each child, the mother is entitled to an additional 1 month off. During maternity leave, female employees are entitled to maternity benefits according to the provisions of the law on social insurance. After the maternity leave period, if needed, female employees may take additional unpaid leave after reaching an agreement with the employer. Before the end of the maternity leave, female employees may return to work after at least 04 months of leave. However, employees must notify the employer in advance, obtain the employer's consent, and have confirmation from a competent medical examination and treatment facility that returning to work early is not harmful to the employee's health. In this case, in addition to the salary for the working days paid by the employer, female employees shall continue to receive maternity benefits by the provisions of the law on social insurance. Male employees whose wives give birth, employees who adopt children under 6 months old, female employees who are surrogate mothers, and employees who are mothers who use surrogacy are entitled to take maternity leave according to the provisions of the law on social insurance^[16].
- Female employees are guaranteed their old jobs when they return to work after the end of their maternity leave period, without any reduction in salary, rights, and

benefits compared to before maternity leave; in case the old job no longer exists, the employer must arrange other jobs for them with salaries not lower than the salaries before maternity leave^[17].

- During the time off work to take care of a sick child under 7 years old, for prenatal check-ups, miscarriages, abortions, stillbirths, medical abortions, contraceptive measures, or sterilization, employees are entitled to benefits according to the provisions of the law on social insurance^[18].
- The Ministry of Labor - Invalids, and Social Affairs promulgates a list of occupations and jobs that negatively impact reproductive and child-rearing functions. Employers must provide complete information on the nature of the danger, risks, and job requirements for employees to choose from. They must ensure employees safety and occupational hygiene conditions according to regulations when using them to do jobs in the list of occupations and jobs that adversely affect reproductive and child-rearing functions.
- **About Retirement age:** Employees who meet the conditions of the social insurance payment period as prescribed by the law on social insurance are entitled to receive a pension when they reach retirement age. The retirement age of employees in normal working conditions is adjusted according to the roadmap until reaching 62 years of age for male employees in 2028 and 60 years of age for female employees in 2035. From 2021, the retirement age of employees in normal working conditions is 60 years and 03 months for male employees and 55 years and 04 months for female employees; after that, each year, it increases by 03 months for male employees and 04 months for female employees^[19].

4. The United States of America's labor laws on female employees

4.1 Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA)

Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA) is part of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA). The primary purpose of this Act is to prohibit wage discrimination based on sex in the same workplace, requiring equal pay for work of equal skill, effort, and responsibility performed under similar working conditions.

However, some exceptions are allowed for wage differentials, including:

- seniority system
- Merit system
- A system that measures earnings by quantity or quality of production
- A differential based on any other factor other than sex

Significantly, an employer that pays a differential wage in violation of this Act may not reduce the wages of any employee to comply with the provisions of this Act.

In addition, the Act also prohibits labor organizations from

¹³ Article 138 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

¹⁴ Article 37 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

¹⁵ Article 122 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

¹⁶ Article 139 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

¹⁷ Article 140 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

¹⁸ Article 141 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

¹⁹ Article 169 Bộ luật lao động 2019.

causing or attempting to cause wage discrimination based on sex. Any money owed to employees for violating these provisions will be considered unpaid minimum wages or overtime wages.

4.2 Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

An employer commits an unlawful employment practice if it (1) Refuses to hire or discharges any individual or discriminates against any individual concerning wages, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because of that individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or (2) Limits, distinguishes, or classifies its employees or applicants for employment in any manner that deprives or tends to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or adversely affects their status as employees, because of that individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; (3) An employment agency shall commit an unlawful employment practice if it refuses to refer for employment, or discriminates against, any individual because of his or her race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, or classifies or refers for employment to any individual based on his or her race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

4.3 Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 (PDA)

Women who are pregnant, have given birth, or have medical conditions related to pregnancy must be treated fairly and without discrimination in all aspects of employment, similar to non-pregnant people with the same ability to work.

4.4 Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA)

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows eligible employees of a qualified employer to take unpaid but job-protected leave, or use appropriate forms of paid leave if they have accrued, for up to 12 workweeks within 12 months for the following reasons:

- Childbirth and newborn care.
- Adoption or foster care.
- Caring for a family member (child, spouse, or parent) with a serious illness.
- The employee himself is seriously ill and cannot perform the job.

After a leave of absence, an employee is generally entitled to return to his or her previous job or equivalent position with the same pay, benefits, and other working conditions.

4.5 Pregnant Workers Fairness Act of 2022 (PWFA)

Non-discrimination concerning reasonable accommodations related to pregnancy shall be an unlawful employment practice by a covered entity when:

- Failing to make reasonable accommodations for known limitations related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions of a qualified employee unless the entity seeking the accommodations can demonstrate that the accommodations would cause an undue hardship to the entity's business operations;
- Require an eligible employee affected by pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions to accept an accommodation other than any other reasonable accommodation achieved through the interactive process referred to in section 2000gg(7);
- Deny employment opportunities to a qualified employee if such denial is based on the covered entity's need to

make reasonable accommodations to known limitations related to the qualified employee's pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions;

- Require an eligible employee to take leave, with or without pay, if a reasonable accommodation can be provided for known limitations related to the eligible employee's pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; or
- Take adverse action regarding employment terms, conditions, or benefits against a qualified employee at the employee's request or use reasonable accommodations for known limitations related to the employee's pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis and comparison of labor laws on female employees between Vietnam and The United States Of America, the author finds that the laws between the two countries are pretty similar, both aiming to better ensure the rights of female employees in the process of working and the role of mothers, ensuring gender equality. However, Vietnamese law needs to improve regulations on female employees further and increase maternity leave time and maternity leave benefits for female employees to increasingly better ensure the rights of female employees.

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